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Guatemalan *Kairos*: Catholic Social Thought, Liberation, and the Course of History, 1965-1976

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Guatemalan *Kairos*: Catholic Social Thought, Liberation, and the Course of History, 1965-1976

by

Creighton Chandler III, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

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Dedication

For my parents, Kathy and Creighton, my guardian angels

Acknowledgements

It has long seemed to me quite unjust that title pages individualize efforts that are by their very nature collective. To be sure, this project has very often been an intensely personal and solitary affair. Yet, to pretend it could have been undertaken or completed without the help of more people than I could ever know or acknowledge in these few lines would constitute a most reprehensible act of narcissism. If my years studying the power of community and liberation have taught me anything, they have reinforced the belief in the obscenity of the "self-made man" fiction that today, as much as ever in my country's history, is worshiped to frightfully dogmatic degrees. History done right can only lead in the opposite direction, toward the sort of humility that comes from recognizing one's own incalculable debt to the talents and offerings of others. What follows is an attempt to honor that history.

I owe a great measure of gratitude to the people and institutions that helped make this research and my graduate studies financially possible. I especially wish to thank the Department of History at the University of Texas at Austin for, among other support along the way such as Research and Teaching Assistantships, backing the dissertation with a Full-year Departmental Fellowship, a Casteñeda Scholarship, and a Mary Helen Quinn Summer Research Fellowship. Throughout my time in Texas, Marilyn Lehman, the History Department's Graduate Coordinator, graciously gave her usual dedication by looking out for me and guiding me through administrative hurdles. Thank you.

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exaggeration, I consider meeting her one of the most providential moments of my life. I will miss the office hours chats most of all.

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I am grateful for my friends and family members who have tirelessly buoyed my spirits and kept me sane over the years, even if I did not always return the favor by having many of them hear way more about this project than they ever bargained for. Well before this project began, for two decades, Stephan E. Wall has been a source of strength and life. His wife, Lauren Baker-Wall, has in recent years added to that joy. I am likewise lucky to have the longstanding, although long-distance, friendships of Mike McCall and Samuel Louis-Bandy.

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I wish to extend an *abrazo fuerte* to my fellow history students. I have been honored to have had my life enriched by Evan Ross and Jenn Hoyt and their beautiful family, the adorable Clementine and the amazing terrier Junebug, as well as by José

Barragán, Claudia Carretta, Pablo Mijangos, and Jackie Zahn. Bonar Hernández has been both a friend and a mentor, and I regard him as an honorary member of my committee. It was through him, particularly over many miles of jogging through the streets of Austin, both of us full of delusions of Rocky-like grandeur, that the seeds to study Guatemala's Catholic Church took root. He has shared research directions, offered critiques, and provided comfort and advice at every step, always embodying the sort of community spirit that this project seeks to capture. I hope his students count their blessings.

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My family has been there for me in ways far too numerous to recount. Thank you to my cousin Nora and her husband, Mike Cozad, who, for one, helped me with a "buddy pass" to fly to interviews in Chicago. My brother Curran and sister-in-law Holly opened hearth and home and even lent me a car for my work at Maryknoll and the northeast. I am indebted my brother, Boyd, and his wife, Ashley for their ever-present support. Boyd in particular kept me nourished with his cookie baking skills in the nose-to-the-grindstone months of my Louisiana writing retreat. Jimmy and Nadrid Calendar have brought much valued light to my life and that of my family. To my parents-in-law, Jacki and Brendan George, and sister- and brother-in-law, Halen and Griffin, thank you for, among so many other things, your understanding it was never you but me when I had to be absent from so many family gatherings to attend to this project.

My great uncle and the only academic in the family, Frank M. Boyd, was a a great supporter of me and my education. You left us way too soon, Uncle Frank, just as this project was getting underway, but you were and still are present with me at every turn.

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While I offer my most sincere thanks to those named above for all of their contributions, none should hold any liability in matters of fact or concept. That responsibility, of course, must rest exclusively with me.

Guatemalan *Kairos*: Catholic Social Thought, Liberation, and the Course of History, 1965-1976

Creighton Chandler III, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Virginia Garrard-Burnett

Guatemalan Kairos chronicles the rise of the discourse of liberation in Guatemala's Catholic Church in the decade following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). In these years, as this study reveals, faith and human history comprised a double helix, constituting two interdependent and mutually supporting sides of the same soteriological vision. Rooted in Vatican II's call to read the "signs of the times," this historically conscious theological framework not only propelled Guatemala's burgeoning progressive Catholic Church to redirect its pastoral practices toward the poor and the marginalized, especially Guatemala's indigenous majority through an indigenized Catholicism. That new approach also sought to reshape the nation's history by redrawing its socioeconomic, epistemological, and cultural landscape, in part through the formation of socially engaged lay leaders (catechists). Scholarship on the liberationist church has largely focused on how, as Guatemala's Cold War civil war (1960-1996) sunk to its nadir in the late 1970s, state repression targeted the church as "subversive." This dissertation, by contrast, seeks to step back from this prevailing attention on later repression to

reconstruct the social and cultural liberative imagination prior to this religious revolution and state counterrevolution. In so doing, it cautions against historical interpretations that have ineluctably connected liberationist praxis in the decade after Vatican II to the—often catechist-led—armed or covert revolutionary activity of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Moreover, intensified by the defeat of the Guatemalan Left, the post-Peace Accords (December 1996) entrenchment of neoliberalism has brought hard times for critical historical consciousness. Indeed, as this study's concluding chapter outlines, how to read the signs of the current historically fragmented times and craft a narrative for liberation amid today's deep structural injustice remains a formidable obstacle. Perhaps the most daunting hurdle in this endeavor is to raise awareness of the need itself, particularly given that Guatemala's historical record remains confronted by the perils inherent in harnessing faith and history in order to shape contemporary circumstances.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction: On the Road to Damascus

> *Knowledge of God is horizontal, not vertical. If I'm made by God, He expects something from me: to work for the continuation of His creation. It sounds idealistic, I know, but it puts in place a framework from which everything else can flow.*
>
> – Father Greg Schaffer, San Lucas Tolimán, November 5, 2010

> *Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time (*kairos*) is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.'*
>
> – Mark 1:14–15

"The best thing we did was burn all of our files," Rolando reflected one chilly morning in June 2010. A Q'eqchi' Mayan catechist, he was then nearly eighty years old, but he remembered poignantly the terror that began to consume Guatemala in the late 1970s. Over three decades later, he still instinctively lowered his voice when he described how at "various times" in those years an unmarked jeep had monitored his house in Cobán. "The soldiers parked right over there, by the *papelería* (stationary store),"[1] he said, gesturing down the street. "They kept me close. They wanted to investigate me because I was in charge of many lists, and we had contact with the people. That was my sin."[2] But *that* was only part of the story.

[1] As in this case, a *papelería* is often a small, famly-run neighborhood store specializing in office and school supplies.

[2] Rolando is a pseudonym given at the informant's request. Interview by author, Cobán, Alta Verapaz, June 12, 2010.

Rolando had been a leader in the social and cultural renewal that swept through Guatemala's Catholic Church in the late 1960s and 1970s. His spiritual life story, as I would learn, encapsulated almost four decades of Catholic history surrounding the watershed reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), or Vatican II, as it is more commonly known. I had gone to his house because I was curious about the early years of Centro San Benito, the Benedictine Diocesan Center for Human Promotion, in Cobán. During the 1970s, San Benito trained thousands of lay Catholic and community leaders from across Guatemala's coffee-rich north central Diocese of Verapaz and beyond. When I met Rolando, I knew that San Benito had offered six-day *cursillos de Cristiandad*, or mini-courses in Christian leadership formation. Three of those days examined the Bible, I had heard; the other three agriculture. But what did farming have to do with the Bible? And why had the people I had encountered not wanted to talk about it?

Six months earlier, to the south of Cobán, near Rabinal, I had on separate occasions interviewed a couple of catechists, or Catholic lay leaders, who had in passing mentioned having attended San Benito's *cursillos* in the 1970s. Both had deftly sidestepped questions about the social composition of the Center's training. When pressed, one fidgeted with his eyes, shifting them nervously to and from the voice recorder on the small, white coffee table between us. What were the general lessons that the courses had drawn from the Bible? "They taught us about *la Palabra*," he replied, "elaborating" by giving the Spanish term for "the Word," or, "the Bible." So what then was the message that emerged from studying la Palabra? His response politely brought

the conversation full circle, demonstrating a mastery of a survival tactic so many Guatemalans learned in war: how to answer without answering. "It was," he said, "on the purpose of *la Biblia*."[3]

The military's counterinsurgency had hammered this catechist's region in the early 1980s. The walls covered with enlarged identification card style photographs at the nearby *Museo Comunitario Rabinal Achí* still bear witness to the massive loss of life. "*Catequista*" appears frequently in the short biographies below each victim's picture. Even though according to my local intermediary my informant had not been involved with the guerrillas, thirty years was not enough time for him to journey over the hazardous terrain of the past with a probing outsider. In Guatemala, history frequently remains a matter of life and death.

Although he requested anonymity, Rolando was happy to discuss his work at San Benito. He was especially proud of the indigenous cultural consciousness that he and a cadre of Catholic activists had animated.[4] For instance, he spoke fondly of Enrique Oxom Pacay, who had been part of that circle and "one of the first Q'eqchi' radio announcers in Cobán," at the widely popular Radio Tezulutlán, the Diocese of Verapaz's station initiated by the Benedictines.[5] He chatted jubilantly of how this Catholic cohort had

[3] Anonymous catechist, interview by author, Nimacabaj, Rabinal, Baja Verapaz, December 6, 2009.

[4] On this group, including a list of some other members, see Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala (CEG), "Entrevista al Sr. Enrique Oxom Pacay," in Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, *Monseñor Juan Gerardi: Testigo Fiel de Dios* (Guatemala: CEG, 1999), 360-361.

[5] Rolando, interview by author, Cobán, Alta Verapaz, June 12, 2010. The well-known Oxam Pacay is best recognized by his on-air name, Macario el Campesino. He was also a member of the Comité organizador del Festival Folklórico Nacional. In 1975, Radio Tezulutlán began offering literacy classes in q'eqchi' as part of the "Escuelas Radiofónicas" program so that by the end of the 1970s, there were 26

helped to pioneer a Q'eqchi' version of the Catholic Mass, *la Celebración de la Palabra de Dios*. The service, Rolando proclaimed, was "the best harvest (*mejor cosecha*)" of San Benito's *cursillos*. Those churches today using "only the marimba," or the "instrument of the Mayans," he enthused, are a "reminder of us" and the cultural expression of the Catholic faith that they had devised. Beginning in the late 1960s, the group had also collaborated with the tireless promoter of an indigenized church, Belgian Q'eqchi' linguist, Father Esteban Haeserijn, C.I.C.M., to teach indigenous language courses for clergy and other religious. One of those students had been the young Bishop of Cobán, Monseñor Juan Gerardi, who, as we will see, was another indefatigable advocate of indigenous voices in the church until his martyrdom in 1998.[6] Rolando was equally excited to point out that there were presently indigenous Catholic priests who had come up through San Benito. Benedictine Father Pedro Choc, Rolando announced, was "*puro Q'eqchi*'."[7]

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schools averaging 19 students. Students received a radio with an antenna and batteries, wooden blackboard, chalk, course books, notebooks, and pencils. See Manos Unidas, Campaña contra el Hambre, "Radio Tezulutlán (Diócesis de Verapaz, Guatemala)," undated communication, available at http://www.manosunidas.org/noticia/la-alfabetizacion-los-pueblos-es-garantia-paz (accessed April 24, 2013; copy on file with the author).

[6] CEG, "Entrevista al Sr. Enrique Oxom Pacay," 359.

[7] Rolando, interview by author, Cobán, Alta Verapaz, June 12, 2010. On the spelling of indigenous ethnic groups, I follow the standardized orthography adopted by the Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala in 1990. For example, the name of the largest ethnic group and language in Alta Verapaz appears as Q'eqchi', not its previous form, K'ekchi'. Some exceptions do exist. In line with common practice, the names of governmental entities such as the Department of Quiché have not been changed to incorporate the new spelling, K'iche'. The latter would, however, be used to refer to the ethnic group and language. Similarly, I have left unaltered document titles or other instances where changing the spelling would detract from the historical authenticity. For a concise analysis of the turn to standardization in the late 1980s and 1990s, in the context of the birth of the pan-Maya movement, see Edward F. Fischer, "Beyond Victimization: Maya Movements in Post-war Guatemala," in Nancy Grey Postero and Leon Zamosc, *The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Latin America* (Portland, Oregon: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), 89-90. See also Nora C. England, "The Role of Language Standardization in Revitalization," in

But Rolando also talked about a more "dangerous" element underpinning this Catholic cultural activism. The consciousness ignited at the *cursillos* reveals a more underlying shift taking place in Catholicism, in Guatemala and more generally in Latin America. Energized by the reforms at Vatican II, by the late 1960s progressives began reframing the church's mission through a prophetic "theology of liberation" that aimed to rediscover and put into social practice a radical Christian love. This emancipationist ethos recognized Biblical texts as a call to Exodus, that is, as a testament to God's desire for his people to be freed from oppression.

In this reading, God's consent to the deliverance of the ancient Israelites from the grips of the Egyptian pharaoh had not constituted a one-time event. Rather, it formed part of a living history central to the trajectory of Judeo-Christian belief. Liberation theology thus empowered people by affirming their sacred obligation to shape their own destinies toward justice. After all, upon hearing the cry of his suffering people, God had put the journey to the "land flowing with milk and honey" into human hands, most notably those of Moses.[8] As Rolando explained San Benito's liberative mission, "More than anything our *cursillos* provided an awakening, a raising of consciousness. The peons (*mozos*) on the coffee plantations worked for miserable wages, that is to say, when the landowners decided to pay them. And they were very submissive. So we intended to give them the

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Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala, ed. Edward F. Fischer and R. McKenna Brown (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

[8] See especially Exodus 3. On the "land flowing with milk and honey," see Exodus 3:8.

opportunity to know their own identity, to raise their heads in human dignity as children of God."[9]

Despite the incineration of San Benito's records, the brutal counterinsurgency campaigns of the late 1970s and early 1980s liquidated countless catechists and church-educated community leaders who appeared in Rolando's directories. During these years—the most savage phase in Guatemala's Cold War civil war that consumed between 150,000 and 200,000 lives between 1960 and 1996—sacred space ceased to be inviolable.[10] State security forces relentlessly targeted Catholics as "guerrillas," "subversives," and "communists." As one former Guatemalan priest, Roberto Paredes Calderón, recently remembered that period, during which people dared to refer to the violence only periphrastically as *La Situación*, security forces "were doing their best to destroy" the Catholic Church "because it was the only organization that could [function] as an organization against the injustices that the government was doing."[11] "That's why they started killing priests, who at that time were sacred," he added. "To kill a priest was a big deal because of the history, the feeling of the people, the culture of the people. Everything. Not because we were superhuman, but the whole thing was something really

[9] Rolando, interview by author, Cobán, Alta Verapaz, June 12, 2010.

[10] The estimates of the dead and disappeared are discussed further in the conclusion.

[11] For more on the origins and use of "*La Situación*," as well as on the empowerment represented by the early 1990s shift in discourse to the use of "*La Violencia*," see Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 14-16. The rise of the latter, she argues, "reflected as much a change in state terror as it did a change in the experiential space of social and political participation," that is, "an opening for freedom to speak," ibid., 15.

sacred for the people."[12] Indeed, by the late 1970s, the Catholic Church had not become an enemy of the Guatemalan State by historical accident.

Project focus

The present analysis steps back from the predominant scholarly and activist attention to the church in the above years of state repression. It instead provides a close reading of the rise of the discourse of liberation as it was imagined in Guatemala's Catholic Church in the decade following the Second Vatican Council. In this brief span, the admixture of fresh understandings of faith, culture, and historical consciousness undermined the self-confident universality of the Catholic Church's call to evangelization and to mission. For progressives, or broadly speaking, those Catholics energized by the doctrinal openness forged at Vatican II, the church's established theological frameworks, pastoral practices, and ecclesiastical structures appeared not only inadequate to confront the challenges of the modern world. They acted in fundamental contradiction to the very life-giving and emancipationist ideals that the church had long claimed to profess.[13]

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[12] Roberto Paredes Calderón, interview by author, San Antonio, TX, September 11, 2011.

[13] In this project, "the church" refers only to the Catholic Church, not to Protestant congregations or the Christian church as a whole, neither of which is the focus of this analysis. This Catholic appropriation of the concept of "the church" is perhaps justified more in historical than in contemporary terms. Catholicism has been the prevailing politico-spiritual force in Guatemala since the arrival of the Europeans in the 1530s, although its influence in people's lived spirituality was frequently nominal or highly syncretic, as this study illuminates. Today, the Catholic faithful in Guatemala are part of a spiritual landscape that is more diverse than ever, including a resurgence of traditional Mayan religious practices, syncretism, mainline Protestants and Evangelicals, as well as smaller populations of Jews, Muslims, and those people of non-faith, among others. Looming largest, however, is the rapid rise of Evangelical Protestantism. Protestantism's first pronounced and official presence in Guatemala—in the form of mainline denominations such as Presbyterians—dates to the modernization efforts enacted after the Liberal Revolution of 1871. But it is chiefly in the last three decades in which Protestantism—predominantly in its Pentecostal varieties—has flourished and challenged in new ways what it means to be Catholic, particularly contributing to an evisceration of a religious, social, and political receptivity to liberation theology. Most notably, not only has Evangelical Protestantism frequently drawn Catholics away from the church. It has

Dear reader, you will notice that the majority of this dissertation consists of the present and the subsequent two paragraphs repeated for the number of pages that my dissertation actually covered. Let me explain. The University of Texas at Austin has in recent years instituted a policy which stipulates that, in order to graduate, doctoral students must submit to online, open access publication of their dissertations through Texas Digital Libraries. We must also pay for this supposed privilege, despite the fact that our dissertations are copyrighted in our names. The university offers only the option to request a one-year delay of online publication, and it gives upfront no guarantee that a postponement will be granted if requested. One year is simply not sufficient to ready dissertations for publication into book form, a necessity for survival in the field of academic history. In a July 19, 2013, statement, the American Historical Association recognized this and other career path difficulties associated with online, open access publication of dissertations. In that statement, the AHA "strongly encourage[d] graduate programs and university libraries to adopt a policy that allows the embargoing of completed history PhD dissertations in digital form for as many as six years."[14]

As of early December 2013, the University of Texas has made no shift its own policy, despite grumblings against this type of exposure, particularly by graduate students in the humanities both at UT and across the academy. Any debate over policy at the

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also spurred the growth in recent years of the Catholic counterpart to the spirit-centered Pentecostalism, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), which first came to Guatemala in 1973. It is the above spiritual plurality that accounts, also, for the lower-case writing of "the church."

[14] American Historical Association, "American Historical Association Statement on Policies Regarding the Embargoing of Completed History PhD Dissertations," July 19, 2019, available online at http://blog.historians.org/2013/07/american-historical-association-statement-on-policies-regarding-the-embargoing-of-completed-history-phd-dissertations/.

University of Texas will undoubtedly be a protracted one. In the interim, the university's submission deadline and graduation must for me hold sway over waiting for the tide to turn. I am consequently left with no viable option other than to take this present academic guerrilla action to thwart UT's policy. In time, I am certain that university officials will side with its students and give priority to the best career interests of those students. It appears that some in the History Department already have, for instance, the Graduate Advisor and vice president of the AHA's professional division, Professor Jacqueline Jones. According to the *New York Times* on July 29, 2013, Professor Jones explained the AHA's above-mentioned statement by noting that "I have heard from junior scholars, newly minted Ph.D's, I have heard from my colleagues who are mentors to these younger scholars, from university press acquisition editors, who say 'we are very happy you released this statement.'"[15]

To be sure, I will independently submit the full version of this dissertation to University Microfilms International (UMI) so that this work will still be accessible to scholars and others who might be interested in reading it. I desire that it have the same availability as dissertations have had in years prior to the present open access publication mandate. I also wish to note that I take this action alone and without the encouragement, advice, or consent of anyone in the Department of History at the University of Texas or

[15] Noam Cohen, "Historians Seek a Delay in Posting Dissertations," *New York Times*, July 29, 2013, B6. Professor Jones is not the only voice in the UT History Department publically supporting the AHA's embargo initiative. For instance, Professor of Latin American History, Ann Twinam, likewise praised the statement in her online comments at an official AHA Q&A posting available at the Association's blog. See http://blog.historians.org/2013/07/qa-on-the-ahas-statement-on-embargoing-of-history-dissertations/. Copy of Twinam's remarks on file with the author.

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From Vatican II to Medellín: Rediscovering faith in history

Rome's call to reform to the church's missiology grew out of the ever pressing need to respond to the political, socioeconomic, and cultural turmoil that followed the Second World War. In particular, the physical and philosophical pillars of colonial power had become increasingly volatile.[21] Peoples from the Third World began staking their claims to the promises of democracy and liberation laid bare by World War II. As Alfred Sauvy, who coined the concept of the "Third World," explained pithily in his seminal 1952 article, "this ignored, exploited, and distrusted Third World, just like the Third Estate, wants to be something."[22] The rapidity with which movements sprang up against foreign political rule, from Vietnam to Ghana, was anything but quotidian. As a case in point, in 1945, the map of Africa looked much like it had in 1900, after the major

[20] American Historical Association, "American Historical Association Statement on Policies Regarding the Embargoing of Completed History PhD Dissertations," July 19, 2019, available online at http://blog.historians.org/2013/07/american-historical-association-statement-on-policies-regarding-the-embargoing-of-completed-history-phd-dissertations/.

[21] Of course, however natural those colonial boundaries appear on the surface, they are rarely, if ever, not in flux. Following Michel Foucault's "polyvalent mobility," Ana Laura Stoler's analysis of racial coloniality outlines how they are "fixed and fluid, precise and protean, received and malleable, all at the same time," see *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2002), 159, 8.

[22] Quoted in Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 59.

European powers had spent two decades carving up the continent into colonies. By 1960, known as the "Year of Africa" because seventeen African nations declared independence, European colonialism on the continent was in shambles.[23]

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[23] The achievement of political independence from European direct-rule colonialism did not mean that African nations would be ignored in geopolitical conflict and intrigue. As, for instance, Piero Gleijeses has pointed out, the United States Department of State had before the 1960s "felt no need for haste when the Africans had been colonial wards, but now that they were sovereign they were pawns in the Cold War, and their views mattered." Economic aid could help provide leverage to gain allies over the Soviets. See *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 6.

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Guatemala: a theological backwater?

In popular and academic work, liberation theology in Latin America is tied closely to resistance to authoritarian regimes, anti-imperialism, class analysis, and revolutionary struggles. In this narrative, the post-Conciliar church in Guatemala—along with the national churches of Mexico and Central America more generally—does not

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come of age or act with distinction until at least a decade after Medellín. Until that time, Edward L. Cleary, O.P., argued in 2009, compared to South American ones, these churches constituted a "theological backwater" unprepared "to absorb the conclusions of the Medellín Conference in 1968."[46] When Central American churches do mature in this historical trajectory, their transformation takes place almost exclusively with respect to "the religious roots of rebellion," as former priest and religious activist Phillip Berryman has dubbed the form of radical Catholicism that undergirded the widespread popular revolutionary movements of the late 1970s and the early 1980s.[47]

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[46] Edward L. Cleary, *How Latin America Saved the Soul of the Catholic Church* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2009), 28.

[47] See Phillip Berryman, *Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).

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The road to Damascus

Given today's widespread—but by no means universal—faith in multiculturalism, ecumenism, and postmodernism, it is perhaps difficult to appreciate fully the pioneering spirit behind Vatican II's desire to engage in dialogue with non-Christian religions and non-Western cultures. Presently, normative claims to religious truth and cultural superiority are all but incongruous with the dominant theological and intellectual circles. We even receive, quite unflinchingly, calls to move beyond Christendom, that is, to replace "theologies of religion" with "comparative theologies."[54] Yet, in the early 1960s, the move toward such an open dialogue beyond the bounds of "traditional" Catholicism represented a momentous shift.

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[54] On the former, see Craig A. Carter's re-reading of Niehbur's *Christ and Culture* (1951), in which Carter argues that "the theory of Christendom must not only be questioned, but must be rejected today as the general paradigm in the context of which approaches to social ethics are developed." Not only is Christendom "dead in some places and dying in others," Carter contends, but he also demonstrates that "it would be detrimental to true Christian faith to try to resurrect, even if [it] turned out to be possible to do so," see *Rethinking* Christ and Culture*: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 17. On the latter, for instance, Francis X. Clooney asserts that "Ideally, theological comparativists do not privilege their own religion as exceptional and do not make judgments on the religions of others," in *Comparative Theology: Deep Thinking Across Religious Borders* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 32. For the difference in "theology of religions" and "comparative theology," see ibid., 14.

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Organization and sources

This study is divided into two sections and a substantive conclusion. The first consists of two chapters that together detail the critical religious and political foundations of the progressive Catholicism that is reconstructed in the second section. Each chapter speaks to the attention—or, better put for the years before Vatican II, the lack of regard—afforded to the integrality of human and salvific history. Moreover, the history of Guatemala's progressive Catholicism in the decade and a half after the Council inevitably encounters the sort of thinking that deliberately, even irreverently, violated boundaries, both geographical and intellectual. At times, therefore, this work zooms out from the particulars of the Guatemala's socioeconomic, cultural, and political settings to capture the international climate of change framing Guatemala's progressive church. At other moments, the analysis zooms in to read more closely how the local contexts either reinforced or reconstituted the lived faith on the ground.

Chapter one follows the church across the critical political developments between 1944 and 1980. In particular, it traces the radicalization of the church and politics in Guatemala between the "Ten Years of Spring" inaugurated with the democratic 1944 October Revolution and the plunge into militarism and violence by the late 1970s. It outlines how in the 1960s many progressives began to become disenchanted with

developmentalist approaches to poverty and inequality, that is, with solutions that worked within the system rather than calling for structural change. In terms indicated by the title to section one, "From Fertilizer to Arms," their attitudes shifted from advancing the use of fertilizers to improve crop yields to acknowledging the need to restructure Guatemala's grossly unequal land tenure, in some cases by armed revolution. Yet, this chapter argues—and as section two further illuminates—developmentalism remained dominant in the liberationist church during its critical decade of growth after Vatican II. The 1960s also witnessed challenges to the paternalistic and assimilationist *indigenista* (indigenist) approaches prominent in the 1940s and 1950s that had operated in tandem with developmentalism. Moreover, it was during a period of relative calm in Guatemala's civil war in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the most critical of liberationist elements—such as integral development—gained traction, many of which would become "subversive" in the late 1970s as the political backdrop shifted to the right.

Chapter two presents a case study of the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, better known as Maryknoll, in its first two decades of mission in Guatemala. Arriving in 1943, the Maryknollers comprised part of a broader effort by the Catholic Church to re-Christianize Guatemala after acute institutional weakness resulting predominantly from the rise of liberalism in the early nineteenth-century. In the 1940s and 1950s, as this chapter demonstrates, the Maryknoll were driven by a pre-Conciliar mission model that, even with notable accommodationist activities, sought to implant a suprahistorical, providentialist Catholicism onto the semi-Catholic or traditional belief

patterns of Huehuetenango's rural indigenous peoples. In a word, evangelization privileged form over lived experience. But while progressives in the post-Conciliar church, including many Maryknollers, would reject this general approach, pastoral initiatives in these decades would establish a dynamic institutional basis through which to carry out later ecclesial reforms. Most notably, the lay development program known as Catholic Action would, particularly after the earthquake of 1976, morph into activist networks that energized a wider popular rebellion.

In the second section, chapters three and four illuminate the on-the-ground development of the social and culture apostolates inspired by reforms at Vatican II and two Latin American-wide, seminal meetings in Colombia in 1968, in April at Melgar and in September at Medellín. Medellín is ubiquitous in histories of liberation theology. Melgar remains mostly hidden, but it was this conference that initially inspired to action two of Guatemala's leading proponents of an indigenous pastoral, Bishops Juan Gerardi and Gerardo Flores.

Chapter three considers two case studies of what were predominantly socioeconomic initiatives. Yet, because they took place in chiefly indigenous dioceses, they were also inescapably interwoven with the progressive church's *auto-crítica*, or self-criticism, of its paternalism and negation of indigenous worldviews and forms of knowledge. At the core of each section is a focus on integral development, a theological conception whereby temporal and sacred histories become mutually compelling in an effort to build up local Christian communities. In this context, chapter three begins by

continuing the Maryknoll story begun in chapter two. It examines the Order's post-Conciliar missiological shift first by reading a series of Maryknoll-produced filmstrips whose main character, Carlos Campesino, or Peasant Charlie, undergoes his own transformation. Living in social isolation, illiterate, and poor, Peasant Charlie becomes a community leader in cooperative and health campaigns. Next, the chapter follows the Maryknolls through the founding of cooperative settlements in the northwest jungle of the Ixcán and the northern Petén department.

The final section of chapter three journeys to the Diocese of Verapaz to reconstruct the early years of the Benedictine Centro San Benito and the advent of a particular kind of catechist, the socially oriented *Delegado de la Palabra* (Delegate of the Word). It enters the Center's classrooms to explore how Biblical texts formed the basis of lay religious education and social actions at San Benito—for example, the training of community-based health care providers. The mainstay of all the movements chronicled in this chapter was an emancipationist emphasis on the elemental ideas driving Guatemala's early progressive church, human dignity and community. To see in these actions the presence of the "subversion" of Marxism, so often the focus of liberation theology's critics, requires a phenomenal talent for historical imagination.

Chapter four turns to the liberationist church and culture. It outlines how, through a series of national *encuentros*, or conferences, from 1971 to 1975, Guatemala's progressive Catholic leadership began to fashion a pioneering and comprehensive pastoral approach known as the *pastoral indigenista*. Privileging autochthonous voices

and cultural patterns, the meetings' organizers brought together indigenous church and community leaders from across Guatemala in an effort to understand their needs on their terms. As this chapter demonstrates, the "*opción preferencial por los indígenas*" propelling the *pastoral indigenista* developed out of domestic and international Catholic activism that, in the late 1960s, drew its lifeblood from radical epistemologies that had emerged coevally. Particularly evident in the resulting "dissident paradigm" social sciences, the new constructivist postures challenged objectivist, globalized explanations for cultural structures that had supported oppression. By reshaping Catholic religious values through what I call a critical pastoral approach to indigenous mission, progressives envisioned that the indigenized or autochthonous church would dismantle the epistemic advantage enjoyed by Eurocentric values. Reformists instead saw the *pastoral indigenista* as a model of pluralist thinking that could extend to Guatemala at large. In a word, the *encuentros* represent the first moment in Guatemalan history when the hierarchy impugned the very constitution of the church's mission to the nation's indigenous peoples.

The conclusion surveys the legacies of the liberationist double helix of faith and history in the last two decades. It demonstrates how, in the waning moments of conflict, the progressive church began to construct its vision for national healing and peace in post-civil war Guatemala by harkening to the prophetic Catholicism that first developed in the 1960s and 1970s. This faith in historical consciousness appears most salient in the work of the Archdiocesan Human Rights Office's "truth commission," known as the

Interdiocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI), undertaken between 1995 and 1998. Yet, while the REMHI project constituted an overt reassertion of the faith in history after nearly two decades of repression, it also represented a last gasp of sorts for history and the prophetic voice of Guatemala's emancipationist church. The murder of the REMHI project's director, Bishop Gerardi, two days after the release of REMHI's final report marks a "*barranco*," or ravine, between two paradigms of history. It is on the other side of that divide that the progressive church has since struggled to reconcile the discombobulated and seemingly ever anachronistic fragments of an historically conscious Christianity with the inexorable, ahistorical logic of neoliberal capitalism, whose post-Cold War consolidation Duncan Green, writing in the mid-1990s, termed the "silent revolution."[59]

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In that spirit, if this study does anything, it strives to advance the type of grace to be found in the knowledge that divine history—and its integral counterpart, human history—can almost always be otherwise. Contrary to a frequent criticism leveled at them, theologies of liberation do not promise or aspire to unattainable utopias. They instead seek to offer hope from bondage through the sort of transformative commitment to the lives of one's sisters and brothers that comes from recognizing and embracing the reflection of the "Other" in the self. In a word, they require a radical empathy. It was, after all, that urgent vision of a faith pregnant with an optimism for the future of human history that provoked—what the Gospel of Luke claims was— Jesus's own proclamation to the Pharisees that, "In fact, the Kingdom is already among you."[67]

[67] See Luke 17:21. Here I have found instructive Paul Knitter's comparative theological discussion of Buddhism and Christianity. Knitter notes that the two religions ultimately share a faith in human history and redemption despite their diverging conceptions of the relationship between history and eschatology. That is, despite the former's belief in the "eternal now" and the latter's understanding of salvation as "propel[ling] history forward toward a final conclusion (the end of the world and Christ's Second Coming)." See Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 190-196.

Part I: From Fertilizer to Arms

Chapter 1

"The Dance of the Millions": Guatemala's Path to Militarism, 1944-1980

This chapter outlines the contraction of political space within which Guatemala's progressive Catholic Church took place in the decade and a half after Vatican II. It begins with the rise and fall of Guatemala's democratic government from 1944-1954, during which the hierarchy's anti-Communist exuberance culminated in the church's vital support of the Central Intelligence Agency-orchestrated ouster of Arbenz. The chapter next turns to new visions of socioeconomic progress that by the late 1950s looked to developmentalist (*desarrollista*) reforms—that is, non-structural measures—both to assuage the fundamental inequalities that plagued Guatemalan society and to undercut the seemingly ubiquitous threat of Communism. By the late 1960s, however, raised expectations had started to yield to frustration and disillusionment as hopes for reform and increased standards of living collided with Guatemala's unflinching socioeconomic realities and modernized networks of political repression.

In the mid-1970s, with a resurgence of guerrilla activity, the state's security forces treated as subversive even previously sanctioned *desarrollista* projects, for instance, church-led cooperatives. In this climate of action and reaction, by the late 1970s the politics of the church's secular developmentalist work, as Sheldon Annis has explained, "[had taken] on subtle shades of meaning" so that "the army was right to treat suspiciously 'innocent' claims such as 'All we're doing here is trying to organize our

marketing coop.'" In other words, Guatemala's church could then no longer escape the political implications inherent in a praxis rooted in both soul and body. "The Guatemalan blend of liberationist theology and developmentalism," Annis continued, "implied a social order in which the army, the government, and the wealthy were on one side of the fence, and the people were on the other."[68]

The "Ten Years of Springtime," 1944-1954

The final years of the Second World War dealt a lethal, but temporary, blow to Latin America's dictatorships. By 1944, as Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough have shown, only four of the region's twenty republics merited the description of "representative democracy." Two and a half years later, nearly the reverse held true. Only five republics, mostly in Central America, had not become democratic; even some of the recalcitrant regimes had made at least some overtures toward a widening of political participation. The region's firmer ties with the United States during the war and the defeat of fascism helped to propel this liberalization. So had internal advancements. Popular voices from the Center and the Left, including Communist parties, gained legal recognition, and the fresh activism socialized the young democracies with an expansion of political, social, and economic rights and guarantees for public welfare. Union membership, in particular, skyrocketed and organized labor's strength grew, making significant strides in working conditions and wages. Yet, Bethell and Roxborough note, this shifting of power "added up to a serious challenge to the established order." The

[68] Sheldon Annis, *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 6.

reaction came decisively between 1947 and 1948, with purges, repression, and exile of leaders.[69] Guatemala would hold out another six years. Its democracy, too, would fall in 1954.

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[69] Discussion based on Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, introduction to *Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, ed. Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3-19.

[70] American Historical Association, "American Historical Association Statement on Policies Regarding the Embargoing of Completed History PhD Dissertations," July 19, 2019, available online at

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Leashing the tiger

"The battle for the Western Hemisphere has begun," as American journalist Daniel James began his famous mid-1954 diatribe against Communist in Guatemala. The coup had "washed away" what he understood as the "Red beachhead" established through the October Revolution. Still, "the Red design for the conquest of the Americas" incubated by Guatemala's Ten Years of Springtime had "survived" the coup because "Communism emerged with something more lasting than a beachhead: an ideology specially adapted to Latin America." The United States had been forced into "a new era in our history," and it now confronted, James insisted, "for the first time, the prospect of

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continuous struggle of Communism on a hemispheric scale."[92] The following year, a special study by the U.S. House of Representatives reinforced James's suspicions. It cast Guatemala's "liberation" as "the showcase of Latin America" in which, as "a political, social, and economic laboratory … the success or failure of this experiment … will be a major factor in determining the future course of Latin American affairs."[93] A few months before, Vice President Richard Nixon had traveled to Guatemala to confirm support for Castillo Armas's regime. "This is the first instance in history when a Communist government has been replaced by a free one," Nixon touted, adding that "the whole world is watching to see which does the better job."[94] To ensure success, the U.S. pumped $130 million of counterrevolutionary development funds into Guatemala between 1954 and 1960.[95]

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[92] Daniel James, *Red Design for the Americas: Guatemalan Prelude* (New York: The John Day Company, 1954), 11.
[93] Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution*, 137.
[94] Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala*, 240.
[95] Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution*, 108.

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The "spiral of violence," 1975-1980

The pace of Guatemala's history accelerated in the mid-1970s. By 1980, national politics had become utterly polarized and manifested itself almost exclusively through a vortex of violence, with the church caught in the eye of storm's revolution and counterrevolution. As Virginia Garrard-Burnett has recently illuminated, those years signaled "not merely the decline of the republican ideal, but, indeed its complete absence in Guatemala—the lack of a perception of a common purpose, a lack of access to power and resources, an absence of equality, belief in the rule of law, or shared sense of national dignity." Whether denoted as a loss of "nationalism" or the nation's "*imaginaire*"—or, in other words, "*ingobernabilidad*," she writes, "in Guatemala in the late 1970s and early 1980s, state violence replaced both ideology and idealism."[138] (It is this destruction of the social contract, I argue in the conclusion, that has proven to be the most difficult obstacle to the religious resuscitation of the community-spirit inherent in liberation theologies, and, even more generally, for recognizing and addressing in secular arenas the inequalities pervading post-civil war, neoliberal Guatemala.)

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Figure 1. "La 'tragedia' de los ricos. (Anuncios aparecidos en la prensa local en la semana siguiente al terremoto)." "The 'tragedy" of the rich. (Announcements that appeared in the local press the week after the earthquake)." From the February 1976 exposé of capitalism, "Un temblor para los ricos, un terremoto para los pobres," or "A tremor for the rich, an earthquake for the poor," by Guerrilla of the Poor comandante Rolando Morán. While thousands lay dead or without homes and resources, he pointed out, disco techs like The Red Baron catered to elite crowds by advertising its "newest cocktail: EARTHQUAKE!"

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* * *

While Guatemalan history had closed to political reform by 1980, for the church in the first decade after Vatican II, it remained very much alive. In those years, as we will see in chapters three and four, Catholicism burst with an optimism born of new theological and practical possibilities for the church to meet both Guatemalan and Catholic history head on and to reshape them toward an affirmation of life and liberation. Yet, before the post-Conciliar years can become clear, we must first examine the form of Catholicism against which Catholics in the decades after Vatican II reacted. It is to those formative years illuminated through the work of the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America from the early 1940s to the early 1960s that we now turn.

Chapter 2

"A Prelude to Catholicism": Maryknoll Missionaries in a Guatemalan Babel, 1943-1965

> *Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth.*
>
> – Genesis 11:9

> *For I shall return and give to the people a choice language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord and serve Him with one consent, from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, even from there the suppliant sons of my dispersed and scattered children shall bring me gifts and presents [emphasis added].*
>
> – Zephaniah 3:9

Father Clarence Witte could not help but chuckle to himself at the thought of the comparison. This, he mused, must have been how Jesus Christ himself had felt nearly two thousand years ago while riding triumphantly into Jerusalem over palm-strewn streets. That August 1943 morning, however, Father Witte was far from the Christian Holy Land. Santa Barbara, like most other indigenous municipalities in Guatemala's remote northwestern department of Huehuetenango, rarely saw a Catholic priest. The arrival of one during the town's annual *fiesta*, or celebration in honor of its patron saint, called for special attention. To Father Witte, it appeared that the whole town had assembled to greet him as he rode his horse over a mountain trail that residents had

fervently covered with branches from the region's ubiquitous pine trees.[160] The people had reason to celebrate, he thought. After centuries of neglect by the church, they would again have steady guidance and supervision in the One True Catholic Faith. The warm welcome seemed to augur a thriving future for the ministry that Father Witte and the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, or Maryknoll, had come to build in Guatemala.[161]

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[160] Clarence J. Witte, M.M., Huehuetenango, August 1943, MFBD, Guatemalan Diaries, Box 1, Folder 15, MMA.. Missioners from different orders had similar experiences. Father José María Suárez, of the Spanish Order, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC), had a memorable entrance into Chichicastenango in 1955. As he described it in a letter soon after, "Mi entrada en la parroquia de Chichicastenango…fue triunfal…en medio del repique de campanas, del ruido ensordecedor de cientos cohetes y bombas y de la música típica de chirimías y tambores. Todas las cofradías indígenas, con sus insignias, se hallaban a la entrada del pueblo y me acompañaron por caminos alfombrados con la hoja de pino perfumada y abovedados por arquitos, donde la orquídea abundaba con su aroma exquisito," letter quoted in Jesús Lada Camblor, MSC, *Pasaron haciendo el bien: Historia de los Misioneros del Sagrado Corazón en Centroamérica (1954-1995)*, Vol. I (Guatemala: Ediciones San Pablo, 2004), 88-89.

[161] Father Witte and the first Maryknolls arrived in Guatemala in March 1943. It was not until August 7, 1943, as Father Witte's diary notes, that "a decision was reached on the question of where in Guatemala we should work, and the decision was that the Department of Huehuetenango should be our field of labor," see Clarence J. Witte, Huehuetenango diary, August 1943, MFBD, Guatemalan Diaries, Box 1, Folder 15, MMA. The official date of entry of the Society was August 19.

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[162] American Historical Association, "American Historical Association Statement on Policies Regarding the Embargoing of Completed History PhD Dissertations," July 19, 2019, available online at http://blog.historians.org/2013/07/american-historical-association-statement-on-policies-regarding-the-embargoing-of-completed-history-phd-dissertations/.

scholars, from university press acquisition editors, who say 'we are very happy you released this statement.'"[163]

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The foundations of Maryknoll

The Maryknoll Order emerged out of the foundational shift in American Catholicism that occurred in the early twentieth-century, alongside the expansion of the United States' international presence in the wake of the Spanish-American War. Until 1908, the U.S. was itself classified by the Vatican as a field of mission. As Penny Lernoux has pointed out, "overwhelmed with the social and economic needs of millions

[163] Noam Cohen, "Historians Seek a Delay in Posting Dissertations," *New York Times*, July 29, 2013, B6. Professor Jones is not the only voice in the UT History Department publically supporting the AHA's embargo initiative. For instance, Professor of Latin American History, Ann Twinam, likewise praised the statement in her online comments at an official AHA Q&A posting available at the Association's blog. See http://blog.historians.org/2013/07/qa-on-the-ahas-statement-on-embargoing-of-history-dissertations/. Copy of Twinam's remarks on file with the author.

of European immigrants," the U.S. Church relied heavily on European churches, especially that of France, both for clergy and funds.[164] Yet, the atmosphere of Catholic immigrant-fueled growth inspired new visions for the role of the U.S. Church within the universal church. Those aspirations appear all the more grand given that, in the early twentieth century, only a handful of sisters and a mere sixteen of the U.S.'s seventeen thousand priests worked abroad. And they did so in an uncoordinated, free-lance capacity because the American Church had no missionary organization.[165] Nevertheless, in 1907, even before the Vatican upgraded the mission status of the U.S. Church, an Irish-American priest, James A. Walsh, began to publish *Maryknoll – The Field Afar* (later renamed, and hereafter referred to as, *Maryknoll*) to inspire missionary zeal. Around that time, Father Walsh's missionary aspirations met their counterpart in North Carolina's "Tar Heel Apostle," Father Thomas F. Price. In 1911, the two fathers applied for and received approval from U.S. bishops and Pope Pius X to found a seminary to train male missionaries. A sisters' organization would follow nine years later.[166]

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[164] Penny Lernoux, *Hearts on Fire: The Story of the Maryknoll Sisters* (New York: Orbis Books, 2012 [1993]), 24.

[165] Ibid., 24.

[166] On the founding of the Maryknoll Sisters, particularly within the patriarchy of early twentieth-century Catholicism, see ibid., chapter one. See also Susan Fitzpatrick-Behrens, *The Maryknoll Catholic Mission in Peru, 1943-1989* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 21-25.

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Figure 2. Images like this one from the March 1950 edition of *The Field Afar* (later *Maryknoll*) aimed to heighten the sense of urgency behind the expansion of the Catholic Church and Maryknoll's mission in Latin America.

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The death of Christendom, 1821-1943

Since Guatemala had gained its independence from Spain in 1821, and then from the Mexican empire under Agustín de Iturbide in 1823, its Catholic Church had weathered anticlerical attacks on its property, power, and prestige from a nearly unbroken chain of Liberal regimes.[173] Under Spanish rule, the church had certainly not acted autonomously. In 1508, Pope Julius II bent to the pressures of King Ferdinand and granted the Crown the *patronato real* (royal patronage) in the Indies. In exchange for the privilege to evangelize the New World, the king would exercise absolute control over the church, particularly the authority to collect tithes, appoint all church officials, and found churches and monasteries. While the Guatemalan church did not attain the riches of many of its counterparts, for instance, the church in neighboring Mexico, it nevertheless did prosper under imperial governance, running schools and amassing fortunes held in land, livestock, bullion, and human—especially indigenous—servants.[174] So much so that

[173] As noted below, the most notable exception was the regime of Rafael Carrera from 1837-1869.

[174] For inventories and a discussion of the church's assets and markers of power, see Mary P. Holleran, *Church and State in Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 42-60. The Guatemalan church's riches were mirrored across Central America. In one estimate, the Central American church owned 914 *haciendas* and 910 sugar mills, see Jim Handy, *Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 44, citing Hazel Marylyn Ingersoll, "The War of the Mountain: A Study of Reactionary Peasant Insurgency in Guatemala, 1837-1873" (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1972), 86.

almost immediately after independence, dismantling the corporate wealth of the new nation's monasteries and convents quickly became a primary target of Liberals.[175]

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[175] These struggles between church and state were by no means unique to Guatemala. For a comparative analysis on the subject, see John Lloyd Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America: A History of Politico-Ecclesiastical Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1934). While one of the earliest professional histories of the region, Mecham's study remains canonical. It should also be noted that the attack on corporately held property did not just affect the church. It also constituted a break with colonial protections, however paternalistic, for indigenous communities. Under the liberals, indigenous peoples would lose communally held lands to *ladinos*. See also Robert M. Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala: The Quiché-Mayas of Momostenango* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).

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Expectations of a New Christendom

Maryknollers' mission in Guatemala drew on a deepening association, both in Maryknoll's Society and in the American Catholic Church more generally, between U.S. Catholicism and the expansion of American influence in the years after World War II. Whereas Washington's postwar approach began quickly rolling back the "Good Neighbor" policy of the Roosevelt administration in favor of intervention against Communism—albeit by proxy rather than the Marines, as in pre-"Good Neighbor" decades—the American Church appeared to turn more toward a type of religious "soft power."[188] The departure address to Maryknoll's 1946 graduating class by Boston's Cold Warrior archbishop, Richard J. Cushing, illustrates this trend. Invited by another staunch anti-Communist and ceremony's emcee, New York's Cardinal Francis Spellman, Archbishop Cushing asserted that "We call you the best of Americans and say that no one can possibly do as much for America as you are going to do." He reminded them that

[188] On late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interventionism and the turn to the "Good Neighbor" policy, see Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), chapter two.

with this prestige came great responsibility, so that "Above all, you must never mix politics with the preaching of the supra-national gospel. You must never enforce upon others the institutions or the language or the tradition of your own nation. Yet by your very detachment and your Catholic universalism you will cause the true American character to be first respected, then loved, then imitated by all who came to know you."[189]

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[189] James F. Garneau, " '*Santiago Matacomunistas*'? Cardinal Cushing's Crusade Against Communism in Latin America and the St. James Society," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 22, no. 4 (Fall, 2004): 99, quoting Joseph Denver, *Cushing of Boston, A Candid Portrait* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1965), 130.

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The "great paradox"

Acculturated to the high status of priests in the U.S. Catholic culture, Maryknollers arrived in Guatemala with the expectation that the collar would assure them entrée into the nation's highest circles. In one of the first diary entries, on March 12, 1943, for instance, the fathers felt put out because they had received their resident permits only "after much waiting," grousing that "the clergy gets no special attention in this land."[192] Yet, the cloth, along with their nationality, had already afforded them access to extensive privilege. In the same report, in fact in the sentences just before, they had recounted how they had begun giving marriage preparatory instruction to a convert from the Church of England who "will marry into one of the most aristocratic Catholic families

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[192] No author, March 1943, MFBD, Guatemalan Diaries, Box 1, Folder 1, MMA.

of the country." In the couple weeks before, the fathers had recounted how "Mrs. Mack, wife of the Standard Oil Manager, calls to take us riding" to Lake Atitlan, during which they "stop at the country club on our way back"; and how a few days later they had gone to "Gustavo Stahl's home (half-Jew, half Spanish, land owners and coffee brokers) for [the] birthday party of [his] daughter."[193] Two months later, the fathers would find themselves riding to Cobán in the car as guests of "a Mr. Dieseldorf [sic]," whose family was one of the largest and most powerful coffee planters in Guatemala, with around a hundred thousand acres in Alta Verapaz.[194]

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[193] Ibid.

[194] Arthur F. Allie, M.M., April/May 1943, MFBD, Guatemalan Diaries, Box 1, Folder 1, MMA. On the Dieseldorff family, see Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, 20-27.

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Back in the saddle again: conflict and accommodation

Maryknollers arrived unprepared theologically to understand the indigenous souls and cultures to whom they were to minister. Rather than equip missioners to navigate the intricacies of Guatemala's diverse native cultures, their religious formation had focused on suprahistorical schemes for establishing the church's authority. Writing a quarter of a century after having to leave Guatemala in 1967, Arthur Melville lamented that "the Church had not designed theology courses for an encounter with a *chimán* [shaman, or

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indigenous religious leader]. Our instructors trained us in philosophical distinctions and moral judgments and the use of Scriptures to validate our position and teachings. They failed to train us to deal with people who claimed to be empowered by divine energy. In fact, they taught us not to deal with such people but to invalidate them."[212] For Joseph McNeil, a former Maryknoll Father who served in Jacaltenango from 1960-1971, the Vatican I-style formation was akin to an "iron maiden."[213] Put simply, the church had come to do the converting, not the other way around. Salvation flowed vertically. Nevertheless, the approaches Maryknollers took to dealing with the *chimán* ran the gamut, from conflict to accommodation. Underlying each, they held the conviction that orthodox Catholicism's eventual triumph was not only proper, but ineluctable.

As such, missioners struggled to understand the seamless blending of traditional indigenous rituals with Catholic symbols and practices outside of terms that fit their own religious frameworks. In 1946, Father Alfred Smith called indigenous belief "Christian encrusted paganism."[214] Father Esselborn tried to think through the issue in 1958. "When we priests come along and teach the fullness of the Catholic faith, the doctrine, the

[212] Melville, *With Eyes to See*, 90. Maryknolls were not unique in this regard. Father Greg Schaffer, when asked about how his own vocational formation had prepared him the priesthood in Guatemala, he replied, "It didn't. I was trained in exactly the same way as a medieval monk." Interview with the author, San Lucas Tolimán, November 5, 2010. Studies of seminary life and formation, especially as it pertains to the practice of the lived social doctrine of the church, remain a much needed area of study in Guatemala and across Latin America. For a pioneering account of the priesthood in Brazil, particularly from the institutionalization in the nineteenth century of what would later be seen as "traditional" through the crisis and (political) transformation in the 1960s and 1970s, see Kenneth P. Serbin, *Needs of the Heart: A Social and Cultural History of Brazil's Clergy and Seminaries* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

[213] Joseph McNeil, interview with the author, Jacaltenango, February 9, 2010.

[214] Alfred E. Smith, M.M., San Miguel Acatán, January-February 1946, MFBD, Guatemalan Diaries, Box 2, Folder 14, MMA.

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Re-Christianizing Guatemala

Philosophical foundations of a New Christendom

Maryknoll efforts to rebuild the Guatemalan church after the Liberals' post-independence dismantling of its power constituted part of a much broader philosophical

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program to readapt the concept of Christendom to the modern world. In particular, it meant restoring the significance of God in a world under attack from what, in 1938, the French neo-scholastic theologian Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) termed the "theology of absolute humanism," or the "theology of rationalism."[231] Maritain constituted one of the most significant theorists in the formation of Catholic religious thought from the 1930s into the 1960s.[232] He writings held sway at the highest theological circles in the North Atlantic Catholic world, and his philosophy traveled to Guatemala, and Latin America generally, primarily as part of the theoretical framework for a lay-building initiative known as Catholic Action.[233]

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[231] Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938 [1936]), 14 and 12.

[232] Maritain maintained his high-level influence on Catholic doctrine until his death, at least among the European hierarchy. In 1968, he was one of two formulators of Paul VI's *Credo of the People of God*, which hewed to the Nicene Creed and was a way for the Papacy to put the brakes on some of the changes sparked by Vatican II.

[233] Catholic Action was an *aggiornamento*, or updating, of sorts of the church's worldly function in order to bolster the laity and the reach of the church—particularly critical in Europe in the decades after the October 1917 Russian Revolution. Edward Cleary notes that Maritain "influenced several generations of Latin American intellectuals and Catholic Actionists. Latin Americans read him in French or in translations of his numerous works. And he indirectly affected Latin Americans through teachers and writers such as Fernando Martínez Paz of Argentina and Tristão de Athayde (Alceu Amoroso Lima) of Brazil," see Edward L. Cleary, *Crisis and Change: The Church in Latin America Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 66.

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Conclusion: on the eve of Vatican II

During the early 1960s, Guatemala's church would still seek to restore a lost Catholicism, but the suprahistorical vision of the previous decades would become increasingly outmoded. Vatican II would accelerate that fundamental questioning of what it meant to evangelize and build a church, particularly among indigenous peoples, cultures, and spiritual practices. It was this atmosphere of receptivity to the Other that moved Maryknoll Father Gregory Roberts, in his1966 diary from Todos Santos Cuchumatán, to "thank God for competition [with *chimánes*]." Those challenges, he explained, had "forced us to reevaluate our presentation of living truths" and "to rethink how best to present God to others, if, first of all, we're working at the job of teaching the truth, [and] if we're really living the Christian life."[248]

The backbone of this doctrinal openness to the world was a new understanding of the function of the laity—or, in Vatican II's term, the "People of God"—as constitutive

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[248] Gregory A. Roberts, Todos Santos Cuchumatán, February 1966, MFBD, Guatemalan Diaries, Box 2, Folder 22, MMA.

of the church. As such, the fundamental outlook toward lay formation shifted. The progressive church began to move away from upholding a fixed, idealized model of the faith, to privileging an approach that fluidly and organically derived from the needs of the People of God. A different sort of catechist emerged within this shifting of the winds, one whose leadership focused on the spiritual and material as indistinguishably shaping Catholic praxis. Only in this way, to borrow the words of Father Roberts, would the church "best use human and material resources" and "mean something to men" so that "the kingdom of Christ will grow."[249] The development of this "grass-roots" style church will be taken up in chapter three, but first we turn to the political backdrop against and through which all church reforms in Guatemala took place.

[249] Ibid.

Part II: Building the People of God

Chapter 3

¡*Despierta*!:
Lay Development and the Rise of the Social Apostolate

> *The time for withdrawing from the world, of disassociating ourselves from it in order to sanctify ourselves, is past. We must prepare ourselves and our people to be in the world.*
>
> – Maryknoll Sister Agnes Jay, "Survey of Maryknoll Sisters, Central America: 1943-1967"

> *Christ came to the world and multiplied the fishes and the loaves; God is feeding us. God did not come to the world merely for spiritual things because we are not only angels. We feel that we are being exploited, and we are suffering a lot.*
>
> – Remark from an indigenous plenary session on "oppression" at the Primer Encuentro de Pastoral Indigenista at Sololá, November 29 - December 3, 1971

In November 1968, as he had done frequently in the intervening years, Father William Donnelly reflected on one of the first pastoral visits to the small villages around Chiantla that he made after his arrival in Guatemala in mid-1965. The brief catechism, or doctrine, class he had given that rainy morning had not turned out as he had planned, and he "got very little response" to his initial questions.[1] The villagers, he surmised, were afraid of answering publicly, especially since they had had "precious little opportunity for learning other than what it takes to live off the land." He switched tactics. He decided to ask something that "anyone present could answer." As he did, he emphasized that he

[1] This account draws on William J. Donnelly, M.M., Diary from Chiantla, November 1968, MFBA, Guatemalan Diaries, Box 1, Folder 6, MMA.

wanted one of the women to respond because, during the class, "they had just sat there on the cold ground without giving much evidence that they were really impressed by my whole presentation." That last question had addressed perhaps the most basic of all Christian tenets, he felt. "Who committed the first sin?" Still, no one said a word. So Father Donnelly "pushed hard for my answer" until "finally one brave woman shouted out her answer: 'Jesus Christ!'" "Beautiful," he remembered thinking dispiritedly.

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Doctrinal developments

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Maryknoll's "Christian revolution" (Huehuetenango)

Populorum Progressio often merely confirmed what practical experiences in the mission field had already taught many Maryknollers about the social sanctity of integral

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development. In a February 1965 mission diary, for instance, Maryknoll Father Donald Lansing contended that the "cultural and economic poverty" from which the "Guatemalan Indian is suffering" was one that "can be alleviated most effectively by a Christian interest in economic and cultural affairs." He urged recognition that Catholics "are not compartmentalized into spiritual and secular segments, but must help man in his totality in Christ." "If we keep our work exclusively on a narrowly-interpreted spiritual plane," Lansing concluded, "we are as effective as the 'Be though clothed and warm' Christian whose kindly sentiments are far from the mind of Christ."[20]

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[20] Donald H. Lansing, M.M., Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango, undated but stamped "received" by Maryknoll on February, 19, 1965, MFBD, Guatemalan Diaries, Box 2, Folder 9, MMA.

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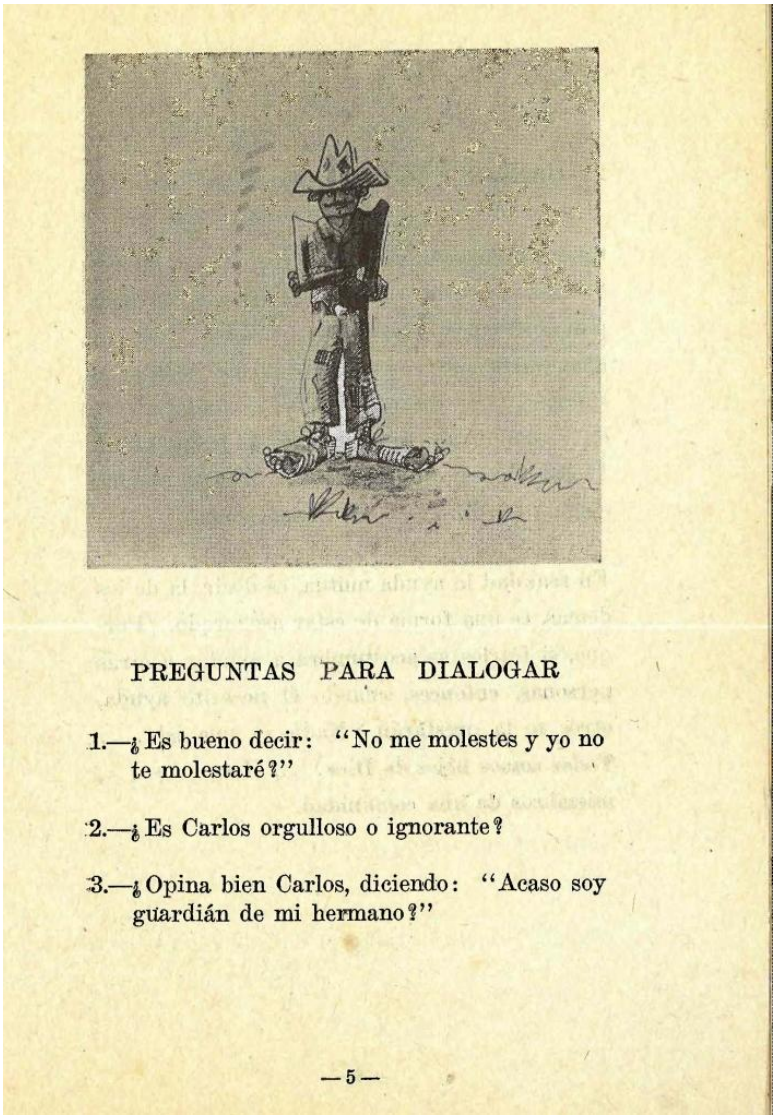

PREGUNTAS PARA DIALOGAR

1.—¿Es bueno decir: "No me molestes y yo no te molestaré?"

2.—¿Es Carlos orgulloso o ignorante?

3.—¿Opina bien Carlos, diciendo: "Acaso soy guardián de mi hermano?"

—5—

Figure 3. Carlos before his transformation. Here he is living in isolation and pessimism.

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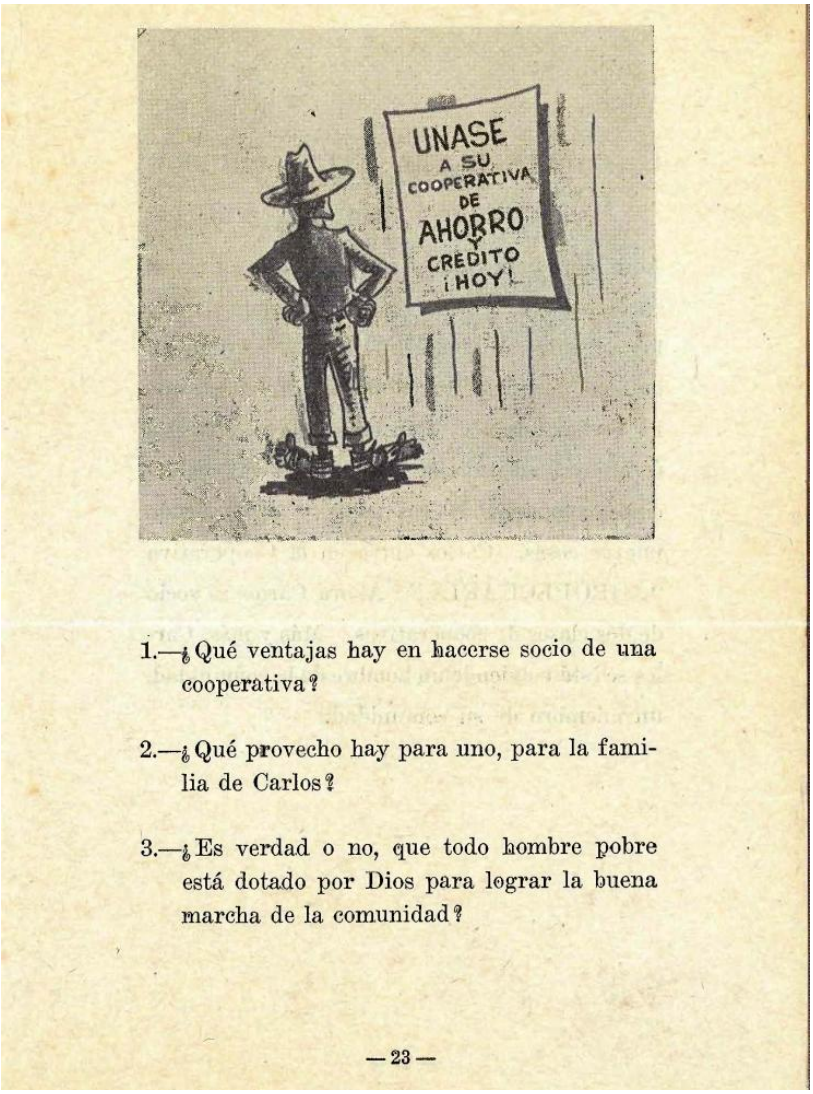

1.—¿Qué ventajas hay en hacerse socio de una cooperativa?

2.—¿Qué provecho hay para uno, para la familia de Carlos?

3.—¿Es verdad o no, que todo hombre pobre está dotado por Dios para lograr la buena marcha de la comunidad?

— 23 —

Figure 4. Carlos beginning his transformation and taking time to read a sign urging community members to "join your savings and loan cooperative today!"

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Centro San Benito (Cobán): *amar, ayudar y levantar*

Maryknollers' socioeconomic apostolate comprised part of a burgeoning network of Catholic formation and development centers that were exploding onto Guatemala's socio-religious landscape by the late 1960s. Not all regions or institutions developed alike or at the same pace or had an commensurate level of success, but a discernible thread of a faith in integral development runs through nearly, if not, all of them. In the Verapaces, the principal center of lay and community leadership training was the Benedictine *Centro San Benito de Promoción Humana*, located in Cobán, Alta Verapaz. The social approach to the Center's mission was evident in the placard that hung above its entryway, which read, "Man has at his disposition all the resources necessary to raise up his brothers."[61] Likewise, its logo, stamped onto the Center's official correspondence, mirrored the

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[61] Quoted in Rafael Melgar, "Historia de la Iglesia de Verapaz, Últimos cincuenta años," in Centro Ak' Kutan, *Rescatando la memoria del camino: Diócesis de Verapaz, 1935-2003*, Materiales Ak' Kutan, No. 14 (Cobán, Guatemala: Centro Ak' Kutan, 2003), 22.

triangular structure of the building. Three isosceles triangles, each pointing inward at the narrowest angle, together form a triangle. Inside each of the three triangles, from bottom left moving clockwise, is one component of the Center's triune mission: *levantar*, *amar*, and *ayudar*, or lift up, love, and assist (figure 6).

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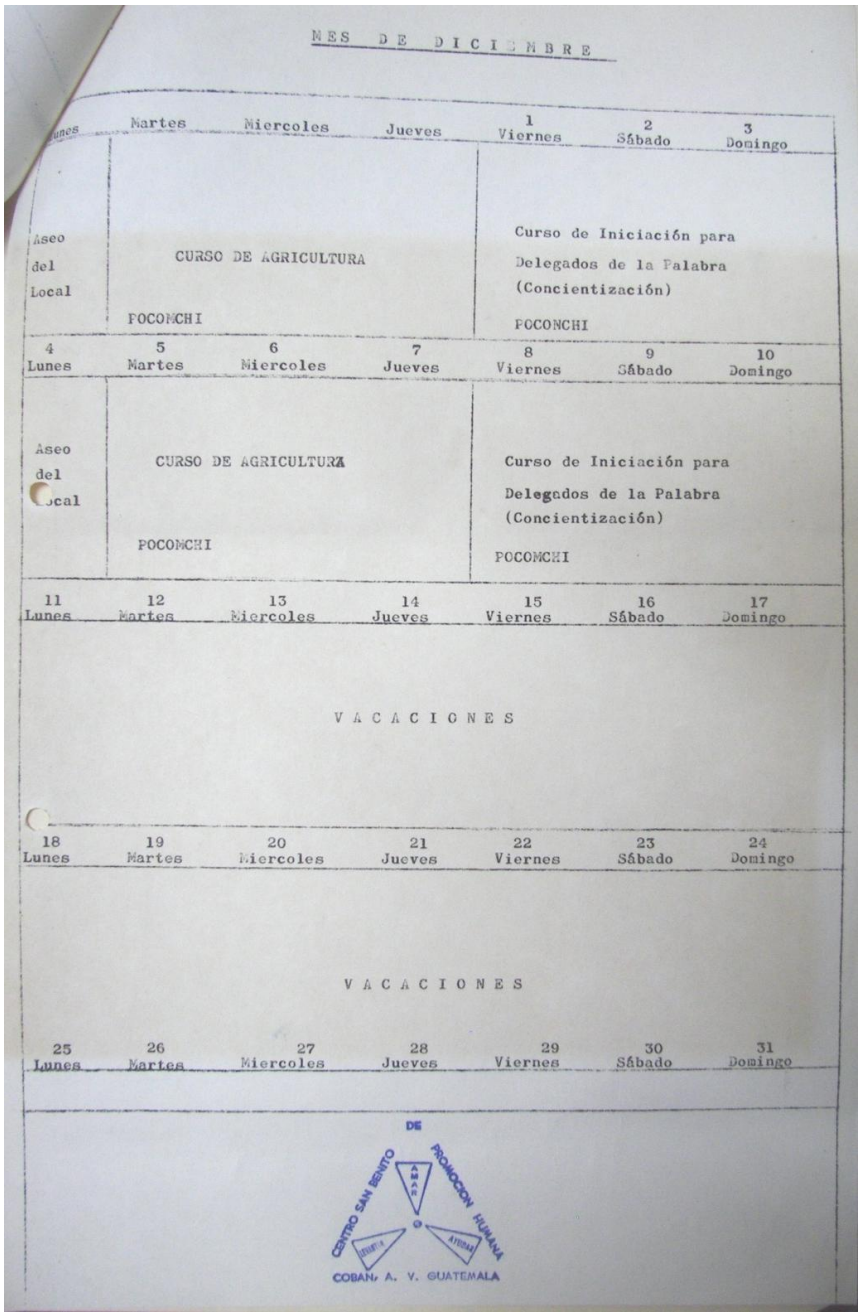

Figure 5. Page from a calendar of courses offered by Centro San Benito de Promoción Humana for the "month of December" in the early 1970s. The design of the logo stamped at the bottom mirrors the triangular shape of the physical Center. Inside each of the inner three triangles, from bottom left moving clockwise, is written one of the three pillars of the Center's mission: *levantar*, *amar*, and *ayudar*, or lift up, love, and assist.

Conclusion

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But, Huehuetenango's church leaders asked, what were the alternatives? Was the church in their diocese and across Latin America not "participating in an irreversible process, that consists of a cultural dialectic" and "an inevitable collision" that could above all be one that was "healthy among civilizations"? Had life before the Spanish Conquest been "optimal, the best possible"? And was it even "possible to incarnate the Christian message in a local culture, being always faithful to the Christian message, and at the same time without making any harmful change to the status quo"? Perhaps through what can cynically be described as an inexorable necessity of institutional survival, diocesan leaders believed that it was. The church must continue ahead, but in doing so with a fresh, more historically conscious vision. The solution, the diocesan letter asserted, lay in promoting "earnest study and cultural understanding; we have to understand the indígena and know who he is." In closing, the letter encapsulated the progressive church's new audacity of mission as follows: although "[i]n the present we do not know what to do," the graver sin "that we run the risk of committing" was that "of doing nothing."[70] It is to this question of culture and Catholic theology that we turn in the following chapter.

[70] Ibid., 92.

Chapter 4

"*Un jardín con varias flores*": La Iglesia Autóctona and Catholic Cultural Liberation

> *Let us look for that which unifies us, rather than that which separates us.*
>
> – Pope John XXIII

> *We are of the same origins as Adam and Eve, but the* ladinos *call us* indios.
>
> – Remark from indigenous plenary group on "oppression" at the Primer Encuentro de Pastoral Indigenista at Sololá, November 29 - December 3, 1971

> *Jesus, by becoming Jewish, or that is by becoming man, became indigenous, in so far as an indigenous person is man … [W]hat he attacked was assimilation, whether Chinese, whether Indigenous, or Blacks or Greeks. Christ, because he became an actual man, became all men at the same time, for human solidarity*.
>
> – Gustavo Gutiérrez, in conversation with CENAMI's pastoral team, November 1971

> *For the ones that God will justify are not those who have heard the Law but those who have kept the Law. So, when gentiles, not having the Law, still through their own innate sense behave as the Law commands, then, even though they have no Law, they are a law for themselves. They can demonstrate the effect of the Law engraved on their hearts, to which their own conscience bears witness … on the day when, according to the gospel that I preach, God, through Jesus Christ, judges all human secrets.*
>
> – Romans 2:12-16

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Institutional and intellectual foundations of the *encuentros*

Participants and institutions

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Shattering inhibitions: *el primer encuentro*, Sololá 1971

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Indigenous vocations: toward multilateral education

In early 1973 at Cobán, Bishop Gerardi emphasized the pressing, and "painful," need to focus attention on the preparation of "apostolic personnel who are adequately trained, existentially connected and incarnated in their community."[69] In fact, he lamented, "the majority of the *agentes de la pastoral* on whom we rely are not prepared to work in indigenous zones."[70] The reality on-the-ground had not yet caught up to the possibilities of an enlightened church leadership hinted at by a developing sensitivity to cultural relativism and the critical social sciences. Indeed, the ability of the church to construct an *Iglesia autóctona* depended on its capacity to understand the past and present ramifications of the church's education initiatives on indigenous communities and to envision a system that derived more harmoniously from local socioeconomic and cultural values.

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Hebrew Mayans and Mayan Hebrews: *la teología de maíz*

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Conclusion

In the end, the broad theoretical approach outlined at the *encuentros* did not produce a polished theological framework or precise course of pastoral action. Rather, the fundamental dialogue and self-critical analysis undertaken evince a church very much *in via*, still seeking to understand how new forms of knowledge would reshape its evangelical praxis toward an affirmation of culture. That critical approach to mission, however, almost immediately collided with Guatemala's larger socioeconomic and political exigencies. In particular, the aspirations for a *pastoral indígena* would be overtaken by the frantic rebuilding efforts after the 1976 earthquake and, soon after, by a state of survival and martyrdom. In those years, progressives' dedication to an *Iglesia*

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autóctona would fall prey to the realities of Guatemala's polarizing socioeconomic and political climate, governed increasingly by the logic of insurgency and anti-Communist repression. The cultural energies forged at the *encuentros* would end just as promptly as they began. But rather than disappear altogether, they would adapt to a different set of radicalized circumstances that were arising in Guatemalan politics by the late 1970s.

In other words, the *pastoral indígena*'s more enduring contribution was the formation of a cadre of indigenous Catholic activists who would, albeit only faintly at the *encuentros*, begin to form an indigenous consciousness founded on a God-given dignity and love that superseded linguistic, local, or ethnic divisions. The inaugural *encuentro* at Sololá in 1971 had, according to more than one indigenous Sister in 1973, been the place '*donde nos dieron vuelta de gato*, that is, where our eyes opened.' It was where they had first realized that 'God did not see my house, my body, or my parents, but that he simply loved me' and wanted that we follow him 'and realize what Christ did, that he was among his own and for them.'[101] They would, as conflict escalated, balance the struggle for cultural and socioeconomic justice and as both part of a Christian praxis.

Yet, given the ever dwindling political options available through which to develop a national indigenous consciousness, the freeing of indigenous identity from Western epistemological constraints brought the danger of merely changing colonial masters. As one proponent of the *pastoral indígena* recalled for anthropologist Diane Nelson in the 1990s, "The indigenous involvement with the guerrilla was important; it helped us leave

[101] Falla, "La religiosa indígena," 214.

off our passive resistance and begin to participate actively. It was a vital expression of our people. But we must be very careful and work very thoughtfully. We want to be heard, to be understood and taken into account. We need recognition for the organizations of the Mayan People, not just incorporation into another struggle."[102] But in the late 1970s, as the hopes of Catholic cultural incarnation became engulfed by a deepening violence, the political realities of civil war would often leave little space to parse such distinctions.

[102] Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound*, 152.

Conclusion: Faith and History on the Other Side of *el Barranco*

> *Communism came to an end. The guerrilla movement ended. But injustice continues onward, tormenting and killing my brothers. And we true Christians are not going to remain with our arms crossed.*
>
> –Anonymous *campesino* in Los Altos de Guatemala, in Ricardo Bendaña Perdomo, S.J., *Ella es lo que nosotros somos y mucho más*, 2001

> *Culture had been among other things a way of keeping radical politics warm, a continuation of it by other means. Increasingly, however, it was to become a substitute for it. In some ways, the 1980s were like the 1880s or the 1960s without the politics. As leftist political hopes faded, cultural studies came to the fore. Dreams of ambitious social change were denounced as illicit 'grand narratives', more likely to lead to totalitarianism than to liberty. From Sydney to San Diego, Capetown to Tromso, everyone was thinking small. Micropolitics broke out on a global scale. A new epic fable of the end of epic fables unfurled across the globe. From one end of a diseased planet to the other, there were calls to abandon planetary thinking. Whatever linked us—whatever was the SAME—was noxious. Difference was the new catch-cry, in a world increasingly subject to the same indignities of starvation and disease, cloned cities, deadly weapons, and CNN television.*
>
> –Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*, 2003

Guatemala's history finally caught up with Bishop Juan Gerardi one Sunday night in April 1998. Indeed, its pursuit had become palpable during the preceding week. It haunted him with presentiments of retribution. On Friday, April 24, for instance, he had assured a friend that "the hard-line elements of the army will react to the accusations." As Judith Escribano has noted, he had even cited "one particular retired military officer …

from whom he expected an adverse reaction."[1] Yet, amid the mounting pressure, Gerardi kept the Faith. He trusted in the sacredness of the mission of the Interdiocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI), the Catholic Church's truth commission that he had directed since its inception three years before.[2] Under the auspices of Guatemala's Archdiocesan Human Rights Office (ODHAG), the REMHI project aimed to consecrate historical consciousness and memory as a prophetic and foundational act of national reconciliation and peace after thirty-six years of civil war, which had come to a close with the signing of the Peace Accords in December 1996.[3]

REMHI brought Gerardi's own spiritual life journey full circle. It rejuvenated the optimism of the church's prophetic voice that had flourished before state repression had murdered or driven progressive Catholicism to the catacombs nearly two decades prior. 'We have done a good thing,' he confided to Teodoro Nieto over coffee that Friday, 'Recuperating the historical memory of the people is a pastoral duty of the Church.' While he conceded that 'it will certainly lead to difficulties for us,' Gerardi retained his

[1] The "hard-line elements" statement is from an anonymous source with the Archdiocesan Human Rights Office (ODHAG) and was reported in the Guatemalan periodical, *Siglo XXI*. For both of the above quotes, see Judith Escribano, "The Cook, the Dog, the Priest and His Lover: Who Killed Bishop Gerardi and Why?" in *Truth and Memory: The Church and Human Rights in El Salvador and Guatemala*, ed. Michael A. Hayes and David Tombs (Herefordshire, England: Gracewing, 2001), 69. On Gerardi's presentiments, see also Francisco Goldman, *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 5–6, 8.

[2] In Spanish, the *Proyecto Interdiocesano* de *Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*.

[3] Given general violence and that directed at the church in the 1980s, only in 1989 could Archbishop Próspero Penados del Barrio (1983-2001) begin to bring ODHAG to life. As Dan Saxon, a UN legal advisor at ODHAG in the 1990s, has pointed out, the church in other Latin American nations—particularly, Chile and El Salvador—had instituted human rights offices earlier, but in Guatemala, "Political tensions and continued suspicion of the Church as a left-wing bastion forced the Catholic hierarchy to maintain a strategy of pure self-conservation for many years." See Dan Saxon, *To Save Her Life: Disappearance, Deliverance, and the United States in Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 78. On the dangers faced by ODHAG'S first director, Ronalth Ochaeta, see ibid., 78–79.

focus on the transcendent value of REMHI's work. By fulfilling its sacred obligation to advance historical consciousness, he affirmed, the church was 'opening the doors to hope.'[4]

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Past as prologue: REMHI's historical vocation

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Kairos crucified, but is the tomb empty?

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"The greatest prize"

Rather than disappear, and despite obituaries,[46] liberationist Christianity's structural critiques can and have adapted their prophetic voice against (neoliberal) capitalist forgetting. It is to such effect amid the contemporary "signs of the times" that theologian Daniel M. Bell has called for a "refusal to cease suffering." That inherently Christian commitment to the poor and the oppressed, to "the crucified people," ought not, Bell cautions, to be "misconstrued as an endorsement of suffering." Rather than actively pursue suffering, which is itself not liberation or a stand-in for redemption, Bell points to the "therapy of forgiveness," or what he notes "is nothing less than an effort to resist the unjust suffering of capitalism [or other corruptions of desire to achieve grace] with a refusal to cease suffering." In a word, Bell adds, that "therapy of forgiveness" is about "entering into suffering, bearing it, in the hope of bearing it away."[47] In suffering is the active, not fatalistic, hope of future accompaniment and salvation.

It is that theology of suffering that still propels the work of Maryknoll Brother Marty Shea and countless other Catholic religious still driven by the historical consciousness of liberation theologies. Having served in Guatemala since 1966, Brother Shea witnessed some of the worst times Guatemala's civil war had to offer. For years, in the 1980s, he and the community he served were on the run through the jungle to escape

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[46] Perhaps most conspicuously, John Paul II's statement in 1996 in El Salvador that the "era of liberation theology is over." See John L. Allen, *Cardinal Ratzinger: The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Ltd., 2005), 169.

[47] Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Liberation Theology after the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 5, 192, 193.

the military. Decades later, he still has trouble recounting what he saw, especially the fate of children, who hold the most special place in his heart.[48] "We buried more than a hundred," he says of his three and a half years of pastoral accompaniment in the refugee camps of southern Mexico, his voice cracking as he chokes back tears.[49] Shea admits that those years—as well as the previous decade spent accompanying the Petén community, Salvador Fajardo, as it lived on the run from the army's repression—have taken their toll on him. After years in the refugee camps, Shea says, "I was a case. So I actually had to take time off. Six months, and get some help. Real help. Not just talking this over with a friend or something. I actually went to a place, the House of Affirmation, and they were able to see me through it.… I'm still coming through it, to tell the truth. You've probably noticed that I'm not a hundred percent; and I guess I never will be."

But out of hell can emerge the hope of history. Shea understands Guatemala's past as "a story of martyrs," as "a story of people living their lives for others." He remembers the poor Mexicans who helped the refugees and "gave their own lives for the Guatemalans." Their shared sacrifice provides the force that propels the future. It offers what Shea characterizes as "the greatest prize." In the lessons of shared tragedy, he says,

> There's a sadness and a fear, but you go through that and you realize that the greatest prize you have received is to share in their suffering. And they know it. The same woundedness; the same, I don't know, depression or burnout if you want to call it [that].… But the beautiful thing is that what they suffered, you

[48] Brother Shea's love for the children is immediately apparent. During my visit to Santa Rita, soon after Brother Shea and I drove into the community, a bevy of children assembled on his porch to play and visit and have a communion of sorts with the snacks that he always makes sure to keep on hand.

[49] Quotes in this paragraph and the next from an interview with Brother Shea, in a documentary produced by the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, titled "Brother Marty Shea: A Life of Mission." Available online at http://www.maryknollbrothers.org/Shea_mission.html.

> suffered. I mean, we're not angels. And you wouldn't have it any other way. Suppose I could do that without being wounded. Well, fine, [I would be] something beyond human. But if you're human, the same consequence is yours, or the same privilege is yours, of sharing in their suffering or woundedness, and their hurt, and their confusion and, in it all, love.[50]

The signing of the Peace Accords ended Salvador Fajardo's eighteen years of flight and dislocation. Afterward, the community located permanently to lands to the southwest of Flores, the Petén region's point of departure for tourists heading more often than not to Tikal. Rechristened Santa Rita, the community continues to attempt to keep one foot firmly in history as the future arrives. For some residents, that is inevitable. They still carry the physical reminders of war in the form of bullet wound scar tissue and embedded pieces of shrapnel.[51]

For the younger generations, however, that history must be kept alive more diligently. And it is. Large murals cover the outer walls of the medical clinic and school, right at the physical heart of the settlement. "*Nuestra lucha es semilla del futuro*, Our struggle is the seed of the future," proclaims the lettering at the top of the large mural at one end of the school (figure 7). The following scenes trace the community's history. The first connects the settlement to the ancient Mayans. Others memorialize the Revolution of 1944 (one caption reads: "The land is for the person who works it … Long live the

[50] The "greatest prize" echoes Philippians 3:14, which reads "I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

[51] After the chapel service with Brother Shea during my visit to Santa Rita in June 2009, one old-timer insisted that I examine his scars.

Revolution of 1944!!![52]) (figure 8), the army's destruction of the community's original settlement, the flight into the jungle, and the Peace Accords of 1996.

Figure 6. "Nuestra lucha es semilla del futuro." "Our struggle is the seed of the future." Mural on the school in Santa Rita, Petén, in June 2009. Photo by the author.

The final scenes depict the precariousness of post-"peace" Guatemala. In the penultimate image, a landowner overlooks a new settlement and tells his right-hand man, "Get rid of these invaders."[53] To the right of that image, a man has been knocked down—presumably on the orders of the landowner—and the hands of his community members

[52] *La tierra es para quien la trabaja … Qué viva La Revolución de 1944!!!*

reach out to help him up. The caption for the final scene, of an expressionless figure eating fruit and drinking coffee, remarks plaintively, "What is abundant in this country are poor people."[54] As he explained the murals one morning in 2009, Brother Shea told of how a beer company had literally tried to erase this popular ownership of the past, by offering to finance a breakfast program for the school contingent on the community's painting over the wall. The people declined, he reported proudly.[55]

Figure 7. "La tierra es para quien la trabaja ... Qué viva La Revolución de 1944!!!" "The land is for the person who works it ... Long live the Revolution of 1944!!!" Mural on the school in Santa Rita, Petén, in June 2009. Photo by the author.

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[53] *Desalojen a estos invasores*

[54] *Lo que sobra en este pais es gente pobre*.

[55] Brother Marty Shea, M.M., personal communication to author, Santa Rita, Petén, Guatemala, June 2009; Brother Marty Shea, M.M., e-mail to author, September 19, 2012.

New roads into the region bring a rapidly modernizing way of life, for better or, as is often the case, for worse. Big ranching has moved into the Petén, and a few powerful people have gobbled up the land, replacing dense forest with cow pastures. While the Peace Accords made loans available for Santa Rita to purchase land, they have done little to promote conditions conducive to repaying the monies. Tensions over the community's massive debts push many inhabitants to seek to sell their stakes in community's lands to outside, private interests. Peace seems more and more to be another scheme to exploit. Through it all, until health issues in late 2012 forced him away, Shea resided in a simple dwelling built by the people with whom he long shared joy and sorrow, and life and death. Those joint experiences, he believes, will continue to provide a lifeblood for future challenges. "Now seeing the kids, the new life, the remnants of the massacre coming back to life. That's a story. And that's probably what I'm trying to get out so that their story will be told. And maybe in the telling, I'll find my own salvation."[56] Maybe so will the community, and we who are fortunate enough to remain open to the mystery of it all.

Still today, the study of Guatemala's liberative Catholicism can help envision a way to deal with the present and to enter the future, even if, like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, we must enter headlong into that future with our backs turned toward it. To be sure, Guatemala's story can foster a deeper appreciation of how the historically derived

[56] Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, "Brother Marty Shea: A Life of Mission."

contours of our perceptions of the divine may serve to arrest xenophobia and nurture tolerance, both among Christians and in dialogue with other faiths and cultures.

The historical consciousness forged by progressive Catholics in Guatemala in the 1960s and 1970s ultimately impels us to examine our own constraints. It illustrates that, through a heightened recognition of those historical limitations and possibilities, we each have the capacity to deploy the supple sense of the divine that Gordon Kaufman has described as "imaginative construction."[57] We need not limit God to a presupposed, static, or transhistorical divinity that has been objectively and uniformly gifted. We must instead cultivate the God that we ourselves—as beings integral to the historical development of the divine revelation—have the privilege and the duty of helping to make manifest. Not to do so, to borrow Mayan activist Luis Enrique Sam Colop's phrase, would be tantamount to "denying an existent plurality" and thus "to construct[ing] a future while walking toward the past."[58]

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[57] Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), see e.g., 21-34. In this work, Kaufman draws from and expands on earlier works, *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) and *An Essay on Theological Method* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975). Kaufman acknowledges our debt to Kant's "discovery that the concepts or images of God and the world are imaginative constructs, created by the mind for certain intra-mental functions, and thus of a different logical order than the concepts and images which we have of the objects of experience." Kaufman continues: "We now know that all our perception is heavily colored by the interpretive schemes carried in language and culture, that we never perceive objects immediately, uninterrupted by a conceptual framework created by the human imagination. Concepts like 'God' and 'world,' which hold together the whole fabric of a culture's understanding of life and reality, are created only over many generations as men and women seek to make sense of their experience in the terms bequeathed by their ancestors. These notions are thus continually and gradually reshaped and remade into broader, more flexible, and more powerful instruments for bringing order into life and experience," in Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, 242-243.

[58] Luis Enrique Sam Colop, "The Discourses of Concealment and 1992," in *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*, ed. Edward F. Fischer and R. McKenna Brown (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1996), 113.

Glossary

ACRO	Acción Católica Rural Obrera
C.I.C.M.	Scheutists Missioners
CA	Maryknoll's Centro Apostólico
CACIF	Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales y Financieras
CAL	Comité Agrario Local
CAPS	Centro de Adiestramiento de Promotores Sociales
CCR	Catholic Charismatic Renewal
CDI	Maryknoll's Centro de Desarrollo Integral in Huehuetenango
CEB	Base Christian Community
CEDECAS	Centro de Capacitación Social
CEG	Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala
CEH	United Nations' Commission for Historical Clarification
CEI	Comisión Episcopal para Indígenas (Mexico)
CELAM	Conference of Latin American Bishops
CENAMI	Centro Nacional de Ayuda a los Mexicanos Indígenas
CENAPI	Centro Nacional de Pastoral Indígena
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe
CEPI	Comisión Episcopal de Pastoral Indígena
CESR	Center for Economic and Social Rights
CEUA	Comité de Estudiantes Universitarios Anticomunistas
CIAS	Centro de Investigación and Acción Social
CIASC	Co-operativa-Industrial y Agrícola de Santiago Cabricán
CIASP	Council of Inter-American Student Programs
CICOP	Catholic Inter-American Cooperation Program
CIDOC	Center for Intercultural Documentation in Cuernavaca, Mexico
CIF	Center for Intercultural Formation in Cuernavaca
CNT	National Confederation of Labor
CNUS	National Committee of Trade Union
CRVM	Vicente Menchú Revolutionary Christians
CUC	Comité de Unidad Campesino
DAN	National Agrarian Department
DMC	Department for Missions for CELAM
ECLA	Economic Commission for Latin America (in Spanish, CEPAL)

EGP	Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres
EMP	Presidential Security Staff
FAR	Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes
GS	*Gaudium et Spes*
III	International Indigenista Institute
IIN	Guatemala's National Indigenista Institute
IPLA	Instituto Pastoral Latinoamericano
LAB	Latin American Bureau, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
LG	*Lumen Gentium*
MAP	Military Assistance Program
MLN	Movimiento de Liberación
MONAP	Movimiento Nacional de Pobladores
MR-13	Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre
MSC	Spanish Sacred Heart
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
OAS	Organization of American States
ODHAG	Guatemala's Archdiocesan Human Rights Office
OIR	State Department's Office of Intelligence Research
ORPA	Organization of People in Arms
PAVLA	Papal Volunteers for Latin America
PI	Pastoral Indigenista
REMHI	Interdiocesan Project for the Recovery of Historical Memory
SC	*Sacrosanctum Concilium*
SSIG	Guatemalan Institute for Social Integration
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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